

Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story

Mini Aodla Freeman returns to
Cape Hope Island in new
documentary film



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A rudder? Or a new ship?

By Lyle Stewart

As it wrapped up its annual three-day gathering in Halifax July 17, the Assembly of First Nations was leaderless, divided and facing an uncertain future. As one chief commented, it is like sailing in a “rudderless ship.”

At the centre of the organization’s problems is how to deal with a crafty carrot-and-stick strategy by the Conservative government to essentially bribe Canada’s First Nations into accepting a paternalistic, one-size-fits-all education system.

Controversy over support for Bill C-33, the First Nations Education Act, led to former National Chief Shawn Atleo’s resignation this spring. The promise of \$1.9 billion in extra education funding is urgently needed. But with it comes tighter government control over a diverse and dispersed group of First Nations across the country. And the stick of domination by a government intent on destroying Native political power was too large for many chiefs to accept.

But the cookie-cutter approach to a starved education system in Native communities is part of a broader problem facing the AFN. Just as the educational needs of children in Haida Gwaii differ from those in Kanestake or Whapmagoostui, it is just as difficult to reconcile the political representation of 600 or so diverse nations into a unified body.

That’s why some chiefs in Halifax were calling for a new AFN charter, saying none of the major issues facing First Nations could be resolved until the Assembly itself is reformed. As Serpent River First Nation Chief Isadore Day wondered, “Are we going to have the time to make all the necessary changes to have a functioning machine?”

As it stands, the AFN works more as a lobbying representative of 600 chiefs in Ottawa. More political weight and legitimacy would accrue if it deepened the way its leaders are chosen. One-member-one-vote may be too unwieldy, but if member

nations elected delegates to AFN leadership and policy conventions, the average Aboriginal in Canada may feel he or she had more of a stake in the organization.

A leadership convention will take place in Winnipeg this December. Quebec Regional AFN Chief Ghislain Picard, who was named interim AFN leader in Halifax, is mulling a run. The journalist and educator Wab Kinew is seriously considering a bid as well. As is a former leadership candidate from 2009, the Saskatchewan regional chief Perry Bellegarde.

All are credible candidates. But will they have the power to stand up to Stephen Harper, who makes it clear he only sees First Nations as obstacles to the oil, mining and forestry industries that are far closer to his priorities? That remains to be seen.

The recent Supreme Court decision to award title over a 1700-square-kilometre territory to the Tsilhqot’in Nation in BC is a major victory that demonstrates that the federal and provincial governments must continue to negotiate with First Nations over land-use issues.

This is usually done on a local or regional basis. But the AFN has an important role to play in intervening with the federal government in Ottawa and by addressing public opinion through its access to the national media.

The former national chief was weak in this regard, seen by many as too conciliatory to a voracious government. He was also slow to catch the wave of activism and sense of revolt among the grassroots, as evidenced by the Idle No More movement.

And finally, when negotiating with the government over something as major as an all-encompassing education act, a leader must know where his or her members stand. Atleo obviously did not, and that hubris was his undoing. The next national chief must do better.

Contents

editorial

A rudder? Or a new ship? 3

rez notes

Whapmagoostui love 4

news

OJ obtains formal recognition 5

Hell’s highway 7

features

Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story 10

Mistissini’s Third Annual Fitness Challenge 14

Cree youth depart for NAIG 19

Canoe brigade on Broadback River 21

Stornaway breaks ground 23

Burgoo, a Canadian cookbook 25

Preventing heartbreak 28

UTNS

A matter of survival 30



Mini Aodla Freeman at Cape Hope Island

photo by:
Niels Jensen



Whapmagoostui love

By Joshua Iserhoff

You know you're getting old when everything turns into "a moment." Every beautiful scene, cool breeze, old song, a certain smell turns emotional and it is in that split second that time stands still. I've been having a lot of those lately! And the best thing about this age is the smart phone – it is within arm's reach for you to capture your moment and share with it instantly with your world-wide-web buddies.

I spent a week in Whapmagoostui and I must say that I absolutely loved the sunsets. I sat alone on the beach and I had a spiritual moment. I'm a crier. I love to cry. I am not ashamed to go into the ugly cry. I am expressive, maybe too much but anyhow...

Just a week before, I was at a leadership school and we learned about having a contemplative life. I had to Google the word in class just so I could follow Mr. Piorek. To sum it up, it was about centring yourselves and allowing the Creator to speak to you. This "contemplative" teaching could have not come at a better time in my life. I sat on the sandy beach (Hi, Lillian Sandy!) and began to exercise what I was taught. What an amazing "moment" I experienced. The sound of waves crashing against the shores while seagulls blissfully flew above me and the Hudson Bay wind blowing on my face, I was in heaven! I watched the sun go down and many tears danced across my face as I felt at peace watching the beautiful sunset. This is heaven on earth! Whapmagoostui should be on your bucket list. You will not be disappointed, especially if you love ATVs and long walks in the dunes. Pretty romantic I say!

Whilst prancing around the gravel streets of Great Whale, I was surprised with a great welcome by my reznote colleague, the one and only, Mr. Sonny Orr! We chatted for a bit, but I couldn't go over for a visit as he had appointments in the south. Always on the move that buddy of ours! By the way, Sonny has the best bomber jacket in the whole Cree Nation. He is a vintage man with great taste and great words!

Two cultures, Cree and Inuit, living side by side, is also fascinating. I loved hearing the Inuit radio broadcaster announce a Puerto Rican song, followed by an Inuit accordion jam. What a fantastic mix! I had the chance to hear Daphne Calvin (who has the best red hair in Kuujjuarapik) and her beautiful friend throat sing. I tried to imitate the sounds but I'll leave it to the ladies to do their thang. Do men throat sing? I forgot to ask. Anyhow, I'll be practicing for sure!

I did the "loop" numerous times, and each time I had incredible "moments." Surely it is untouched land and so beautiful. I'll never forget my time at the beach. I thank the Creator for blessing our friends in Whapmagoostui/ Great Whale/ Kuujjuarapik/ Poste-de-la-Baleine (four names for the same place) with beautiful scenery and one mighty river.

One last thing, you have to ask one of the locals about Muntoonuk and its mermaids, or go and see Amy D. Salt – she'll tell you all about it. Happy 81st Birthday to Elder Matthew Natachequan! Hugs to Alice, sheedoo!

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Another Cree Act Band

Oujé-Bougoumou finally obtains formal recognition

By Amy German

A decades-long struggle finally became reality May 16 when Canada's Privy Council adopted the order to officially recognize the Cree Nation of Oujé-Bougoumou as a Cree Act Band.

"When we learned that all of the necessary steps had been completed for Oujé-Bougoumou to be finally and fully incorporated into the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Cree-Naskapi Act, we were of course overjoyed," said Abel Bosum, a former Chief of Oujé-Bougoumou and the current Cree-Quebec Negotiator Grand Council of the Crees.

"This was the culmination of our long journey from being regarded as squatters on our own land to occupying our proper role within the Cree Nation and within our region. It was a journey from total marginalization to having a major role in the economic and political life of our region."

According to current Chief Reggie Neeposh, the dream of an Oujé-Bougoumou community began in the early 1960s. Then-Chief Jimmy Mianscum, with the assistance of David Bosum, wrote to the federal Indian Affairs department to request that land be set aside for the Oujé-Bougoumou people to build a village. While a separate Nation, the people of Oujé had administratively grouped by Indian Affairs with the Cree Nation of Mistissini.

"We told the Indian Affairs agent that we are not from



Years of collusion between mining companies and the Quebec and Canadian governments forced Ouje Crees to relocate their villages seven times over fifty years, with the last relocation occurring in 1970. Community members dispersed throughout their territory, establishing small encampments that consisted of crude, makeshift dwellings, often just simple tent frames.

Mistissini, we are Oujé-Bougoumou people, we are a different community," said Neeposh.

The letter is now treasured as a historic document. It contains a detailed vision of what would eventually become a unique First Nations community. Almost 50 years later, the political aspect of those plans is now in place.

It's a struggle that has always been part of Neeposh's life. From the time he was very young he knew about the importance of Oujé's fight for recognition.

Neeposh said that it never would have happened without the hard work from many previous community leaders, including Chief Jimmy Mianscum, Abel Bosum, Sam R. Bosum and Louise Wapachee.

Celebrations of the official recognition may take some time.

"We have a community assembly on July 22-23 where we are going to inform the people what has happened but we are really planning on doing something special for the one year anniversary of our recognition," said Neeposh.

Cree Nation of Chisasibi Golf Benefit In Partnership with Chisasibi Sports & Recreation Association 4th Annual Friendship Golf Tournament

A fundraiser for local sports activities, that promote health,
fitness and social activities for a healthier community.

August 8, 2014
Shotgun start @ 1 pm

Location:
Château Cartier Golf Course, Gatineau (QC) Double Tree Hilton

Prizes:
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2 Tickets for an
Ottawa Senators Game

4 Hole in one Prizes:
Hole #17 win a Ford Edge
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Includes lunch, live music and entertainment in the evening.

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Hell's highway

Hydro-Québec slashes maintenance budget for James Bay Highway

By Jeremy East



Already infamous for its rough driving conditions, a budgeting decision by Hydro-Québec means travellers on the James Bay Highway could face increasingly treacherous conditions in the future.

The Société de développement de la Baie-James (SDBJ), the government entity responsible for the maintenance of the 620-km long route, revealed in its annual report that the annual road maintenance budget will be cut by 40% next year.

The maintenance includes basic upkeep as well as the purchase and dispersal of salt and abrasives during the winter. It was long financed entirely by Hydro-Québec. In 2015, the hydroelectric giant will reduce its annual contribution from \$4.8 million to \$2.7 million.

If additional funding is not obtained, the cut could force Crees and Jamesiens onto dangerous, unmaintained and isolated stretches of highway throughout the winter months. The SDBJ had hoped for a minimal budget of \$8.2 million for the highway in 2015, but will receive only one third of that amount.

"This is absolutely unacceptable on behalf of Hydro-Québec. In the Eeyou Istchee James Bay region, the James Bay Highway is an essential strategic highway," said Manon Cyr, chairperson of the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government. "The industries as well as the Cree and Jamesien residents of the territory need to travel on a secure road. Hydro-Québec should maintain its commitment by ensuring a decent maintenance of the highway."

Built in the 1970s as part of Hydro-Québec's development throughout James Bay, the highway stretches from Matagami to Radisson, with access roads to several Cree communities meeting it along the way. Used by roughly 55,000 people annually, the highway does not fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport, and has long relied on the crown corporation for its maintenance budget.

But according to Hydro-Québec, they've done enough of the highway's financing and it's time for others to contribute.

"Over the years, Hydro-Québec has suggested to the SDBJ that they solicit contributions from other users so that costs could be shared fairly depending on use of the road," said Hydro-Québec Media Relations Officer Patrice Lavoie, adding that discussions between Hydro-Québec and the SDBJ were "ongoing."

In the meantime, the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government is seeking additional funding for the highway from the provincial government. The Cree-Jamesien alliance has requested that the provincial government's Plan Nord devote an annual maintenance budget of \$8.2 million for the highway.

Although it's unclear what the newly elected Liberal government plans for long-term care of the James Bay Highway, the Regional Government is hoping for the same commitment promised by the Parti Québécois before they were ousted in April — \$100 million in road repairs to be funded at 85% from the Fonds du développement nordique and 15% by Hydro-Québec.

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2014 Cultural Gathering

Hosted by the Nishiiyuu Elders Council / Nishiiyuu Paataakusuun

Theme: Nishiyuu Nishditihiimoon – Nishiyuu Values

September 9, 10, 11 & 12, 2014

Mistissini (Eeyou Istchee)

Workshops

- Family Values
- Cultural Values
- Historical Values
- Economic Values
- Judicial Values
- Educational Values
- Medicinal/Health Values

There will be various exhibits, demonstrations, story telling, and traditional food tasting
Workshops will be conducted by the Elders themselves



For more information:
Stella M. Bearskin
819-855-6690
wabinjuksh@live.ca

Deadline to register: September 1, 2014

Everyone is encouraged to come and participate, gathering/workshops will be conducted in Cree (both inland and coastal dialects)

Val d'Or Friendship Centre wins top honours

The Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre received the 2014 National Award of Excellence earlier this month at the 43rd general annual assembly of the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC).

The award recognized the Val-d'Or centre's outstanding performance in carrying out its mission, as well as the leadership association brought to urban Aboriginals in the community. All 120 of the NAFC's branches were considered for the award, but the Val d'Or establishment stood out for its sound financial, administrative and human-resource management.

"Our centre and the town of Val-d'Or stand out across Canada by their openness and dialogue with one another," said Oscar Kistabish, president of the Val-d'Or Friendship Centre's Board of Directors. "We wish to share this honour with all of our fellow citizens because it's the whole Val-d'Or com-

munity that shines across Canada through its efforts for a better quality of life for all."

The prestigious award comes in the wake of another landmark event for the centre, which is currently celebrating its 40th anniversary. Executive Director Édith Cloutier was named to the Order of Canada earlier this year.

Mysterious vote count delays mar Mistissini elections

Usually, results from band council elections are made available in the hours following the closing of poll stations. But Mistissini voters had to wait almost two days to find out who was leading or elected in the first round of polling July 15. More than 27 hours after polls closed at 8:00 pm that Tuesday, residents finally received some information.

There will be a run-off election between Henry Mianscum and incumbent Richard Shecapio for chief. The

post of deputy chief will see a face off between Gerald Longchap and John S. Matoush.

Elected to sit on the Mistissini band council are Maggie M. Spencer, Lucy Trapper, Alfred Coonishish, Noah Coonishish, Shawn Iserhoff, William Macleod and Jerry Matoush.

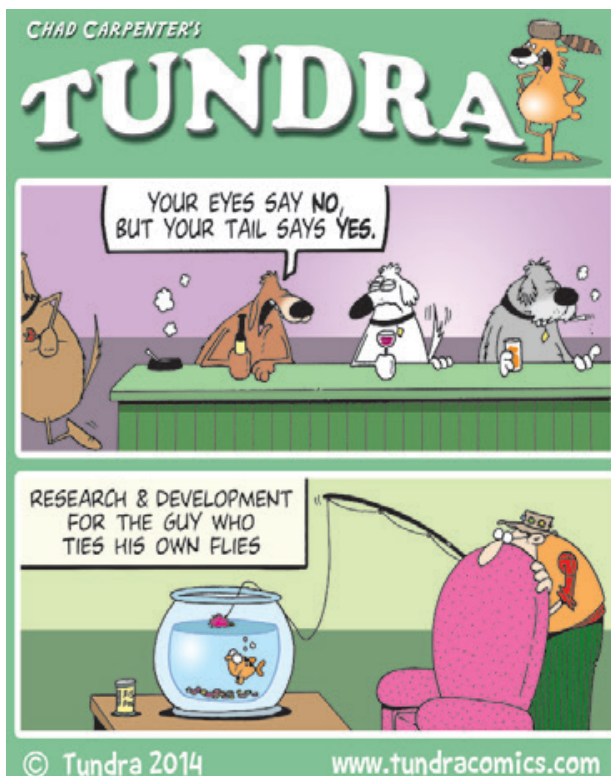
Of the 2499 people eligible to vote in the election, 1425 cast a ballot. This is how the community voted for the positions of Chief and Deputy Chief

Chief

Andy Baribeau – 10%
Kenny Blacksmith – 3%
Ashley Iserhoff – 7%
Alfred Loon – 4%
Henry Mianscum – 31%
Thomas Neeposh – 13%
Richard Shecapio – 29%
Johnny S. Trapper – 4%

Deputy Chief

Calvin Blacksmith – 20%
Kenneth Macleod – 5%
Samuel Mianscum – 20%
Gerald Longchap – 27%
John S. Matoush – 27%



An island story

Behind the making of the documentary film, *Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story*

By Amy German



Cape Hope Island

photo: Louise Abbott

Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association's (COTA) latest film, *Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story*, showcases the sustainability of life on Cape Hope (Nunaaluk), a James Bay island near Wemindji, while exploring the rich history of its former Inuk inhabitants.

This 29-minute documentary, directed by Louise Abbott and produced by COTA, tells the story of George Weetaltuk and his extended family's peaceful coexistence with their Cree neighbours on Cape Hope at a time when Inuit/Cree relations were poor.

Narrated by Mini Aodla Freeman, the last remaining Inuk born on the island, the film is a celebration of Nunaaluk's past. She tells a story of Freeman's return to the

island after many years and revisits her childhood through film and photographs shot in 1954 during a visit by the late Arctic author and photographer Fred Bruemmer.

The film opens with a boat heading to the serene island with Freeman returning for the first time to visit the remnants of her family's settlement and the hunting camp that belongs to Wemindji's George Kudlu. While the island was Inuit territory until 1960, it is now controlled by Wemindji.

COTA's Dorothy Stewart, who is from Wemindji and has a background in history, is quite familiar with the territory, its stories and the Inuit people who once lived there.



From top: George Weetaltuk and Inuit crew building boat in 1949, Remains of boat, George and Aqpik

“I knew a bit about this history because Old Factory is my family’s hunting territory,” said Stewart. “I remember as a young girl, we were the last ones (to move) by canoe because our hunting territory was there.”

In 2012, before she worked for COTA, Stewart happened to be in the area with COTA Executive Director Robin McGinley. She was asked how much she knew about the island and the Inuit. It was at that time that they spoke with George Kudlu, whose hunting camp is on the island, and when several Inuit dropped by to visit Stewart’s father.

“Robin felt that there was something important there because people have always thought that there was nothing on the coast. This isn’t true – there is a lot of history. That is how



photo: Louise Abbott

photo: Louise Abbott

this film came about,” said Stewart.

Then working for the Cree Nation of Wemindji, Stewart was hired by COTA to work on the film project.

The film tries to show that not only is life possible on one of these islands, but it is sustainable. To depict this, the film illustrates the history of George Weetaltuk, the patriarch of the settlement and Freeman’s grandfather.

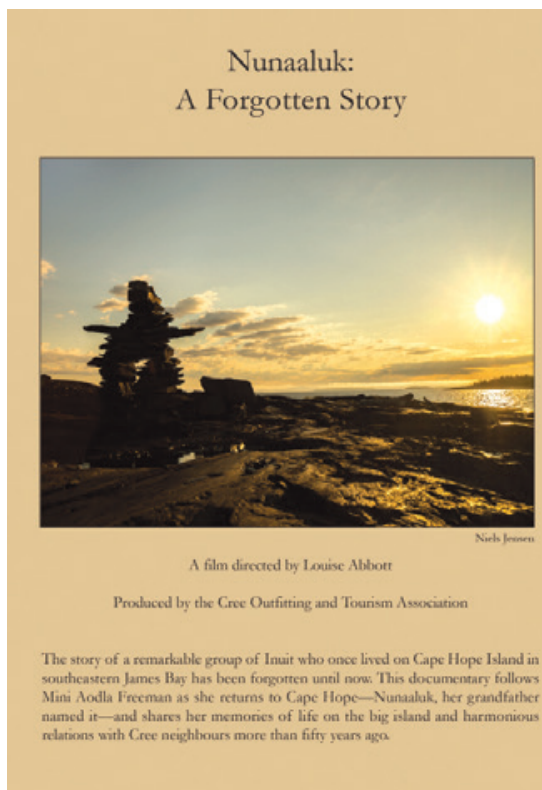
Several scenes in the film show images of Weetaltuk from the 1950s and certain items he made as a self-taught master craftsman – everything from boats to furnishings that are still in use at Wemindji’s local church.

One scene shows Freeman standing next to an ornate, hand-carved bishop’s chair that her grandfather had crafted and which the church still uses.

Louise Abbot had already done extensive research on the Cree for her 2010 book *Eeyou Istchee: Land of the Cree/Terre des Cris*, which gave her some familiarity with Weetaltuk’s story. But investigating how the Inuit settled on Cape Hope and were eventually forced to leave would take much more digging and a couple of lucky breaks.

The film wouldn’t have happened had COTA and Abbott not been able to locate people from the settlement or the man who shot the original footage on the island.

Now living in Alberta, Freeman documented portions of her life story in the 1978 book, *My Life Among the Qallunaat*. Once the elderly Inuk was tracked down, finding images of the area and the settlement became the next challenge.



Video Jacket

Abbott began a lengthy email correspondence with Freeman to learn as much as she could. One day Abbott asked Freeman if she remembered if any outsider had visited or taken any photos. The elderly Inuk mentioned a 1954 visit by Bruemmer.

It had just so happened that Abbott had interviewed Bruemmer in the late 1980s for a *Montreal Gazette* article. Despite the fact that he was suffering from cancer at the time, he granted Abbott the interview that appears in the film. While obviously frail, Bruemmer was still very animated and his memory of that 1954 trip to Cape Hope remained vivid.

Sadly, Bruemmer died the very day that the film had its world premiere, though Abbott had previously arranged a spe-

cial viewing for Bruemmer and his family via the Internet.

Abbott was intrigued by the lasting impression that Weetaltuk had left on Bruemmer.

“He had this small sculpture of a seal that Weetaltuk had given him in 1954 and he had brought this with him when he went to get his heart transplant and he had it with him when he died,” said Abbott.

“He said that Weetaltuk had given him a shamanic blessing which translated into English as ‘may your life be blessed with seals,’ meaning probably May you always have something to eat or something like that. But in Fred’s case, it became very literal because up until that point he had never seen a seal before. But his most acclaimed and popular books would be of his photographs of seals. His life was quite literally blessed with seals.”



Louise at work in Old Factory



George with fishnet

photos: Niels Jensen

Abbott said there were many “lucky strikes” while making the film. Had she not begun to work on it when she did, Bruemmer’s memories would not have been recorded for posterity.

More luck came in tracking down Elizabeth Mark, who is originally from Wemindji but now lives in Ottawa. Interviewed in the film, Mark was actually one of Freeman’s childhood friends and vividly remembers the Inuit who used to visit Old Factory. Having previously met Kudlu in 2009 during the research for her book, Abbott said she was quite fortunate to access the people she needed for the film.

“I felt that this was just the right number of people to tell this story and to get the different vantage points. With a half-hour film you don’t want too many characters. It is much

better to get to know the ones that you have,” explained Abbott.

According to Freeman, her return to Cape Hope was one of mixed emotions because she remembered life on a land that was once hers.

“We had to accept the idea that it is being looked after by the Cree and it is in very good hands. When I landed I wanted to kiss the land, but I got very shy as there were people looking at me when I arrived so I didn’t do anything,” said Freeman.

Her grandfather’s mark on this territory and the people who still inhabit it are lasting. But when asked what she thought her grandfather’s reaction to the film would have been if he were still alive, she spoke of his modesty.

“He was such an unassuming person and so he would

never say I did this or I did that or I made this and that. He would just never tell you about all of the things that he did. He was a quiet and proud person and I don’t think that we could ever really know what he thought but I know that he enjoyed Cape Hope,” said Freeman.

Freeman hopes that young Native people who view the film remember to be very careful with their own land. But, more than anything, she said, “I hope that they enjoy this film. That is all.”

COTA is currently exhibiting *Nunaaluk* around Eeyou Istchee and has already toured film festivals throughout Canada and the United States. It will be screened in Montreal at the Présence Autochone’s Terre en vues Festival on August 2.

On the mark

Mistissini's Third Annual Fitness Challenge offered chance to turn exercise into cash

By Jesse Staniforth



It's one thing to make fitness in the communities of the Cree Nation a priority. It's another thing to make it competitive, which is what Mistissini's Sports and Recreation Department attempted to do with its third annual Mistissini Fitness Challenge July 12-13.

This year the competition featured over 40 adult competitors, as well as a wide variety of junior (aged 15 to 17), youth (12-14) and children (8-11) participants, vying for a total of over \$25,000 in cash prizes and awards.

"We made it invitational," said Helen Gunner of the Sports and Recreation Department. "It's open to Natives and non-Natives."

She explained that Mistissini watched as the Nemaska Fitness Challenge drew strong numbers of participants, and decided to replicate the event at home.

"Even though it's open to everyone, we only got a few people from Chibougamau and Nemaska," Gunner said, noting

that the majority of participants were Mistissini residents.

Entrants could participate as individuals or as part of relay teams. Over two days, the contest featured five events: swimming, cycling and running for all – plus, for adult teams only, canoeing and portaging. The most challenging contest was the Men's Competitive, in which participants had to run 10 km, paddle 2 km, portage 1 km, cycle 20 km, and swim 1 km.

"It's not easy to do," Gunner said about the Men's Competitive. "You need to train well for that. The winner is the fastest."

It was followed in difficulty by the Women's Competitive, which slightly reduced the target distances for every event but swimming, and then by Adult Recreational and the Junior, Youth, and Children's events, which were each adjusted to the abilities of their competitors' age groups.

"The goal is really to encourage health and fitness," Gunner said

about the purpose of the competition. She notes that in Mistissini, like everywhere else, obesity and diabetes are concerns that deserve an aggressive response. "It isn't just here that there are problems like that," she said. "It's all over the Cree Nation."

For a person who's out of shape or battling obesity, getting into better fitness might seem like an abstract goal that's hard to work toward. Better to have a specific date to get ready for, and a specific prize to try to win. For that reason, the Fitness Challenge, with a \$1500 top prize for adult competitors, and \$500 for juniors, is partly designed to give people who might never have thought about getting fit a reason to begin working out.

Because it's also invitational, there's an element of competition from members of other communities. That element also emboldens Mistissini's reputation as one of the Cree Nation's fitness hubs, boasting the Neoskwekau Complex, which brings the community together in pursuit of physical fitness.

The only barb in the Fitness Challenge was the cost of entry, which peaked at \$300 per person for the single adult categories, and \$250 per younger entrant, a serious investment in the hope to win back your money and more. Still, Gunner doubts that the cost of entry prevented anyone who wanted to from participating.

"I don't think that's been a problem for anyone," said Gunner. "If people didn't come, it was probably more because they hadn't done enough training."



NATION-BUILDING

Since the signing of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* in 1975, the Cree Nation has been on a contemporary path of Nation-building. We have accomplished much in a short span of time. We have, over the course of nearly forty years, put in place all the major building blocks for a strong indigenous Nation.

The Cree Development Corporation is a key component of this bold vision of the Cree future – a future where we Cree take full control of our economic destiny, a future where the political strength is matched by our economic strength. The Cree Nation has paved the way for building a strong economy.

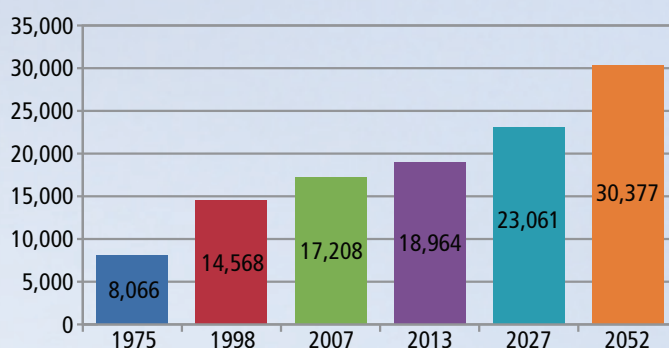
THE VISION

We have before us a future where the Cree Nation is poised to be a major force in the economic development of Eeyou Istchee and beyond. A future where we have the economic tools to build a vibrant Cree Nation that creates opportunities for our entrepreneurs and especially for our youth. With the Cree Development Corporation, we will be able to build on our achievements to date and build a stronger future.

Our population is growing very fast. Our young people need jobs and opportunities in Eeyou Istchee to raise their families here. They need to see a future for themselves in Eeyou Istchee. One, where their dreams and ambitions can be fulfilled. This is what the Cree Development Corporation is about. It's about building. It's about improving. It's about creating new opportunities for our people.

Historical Cree Population Projected to 2052

Average Yearly Growth 2.32%



At an average yearly growth rate of 2.32% the population could double in the next 30 years.



The *Paix des Braves* created the Wyapschinigun Fund to be the heritage fund for the future of the Crees. In addition to the Wyapschinigun Fund, the *Paix des Braves* created the Cree Development Corporation as the main vehicle for Cree economic development. The Cree Development Corporation will help us move to the next phase of Cree Nation-building. By democratically supporting the *Paix des Braves*, the people gave the mandate to the Cree leadership to create and advance the Cree Development Corporation. The people demonstrated their confidence in our leadership. The people have decided.

THE FUTURE

The Cree Development Corporation will be an active agent of economic development. It will pool many of our Cree financial resources so that we can make strategic investments in key sectors that will create wealth for the Cree Nation as well as job and business opportunities for our people. We need substantial financial resources to make these investments, and the Cree Development Corporation's plan will ensure that these resources are in place to accomplish this.

The Cree Development Corporation will partner with key players in the world of finance and business in Québec and Canada to take full advantage of investment and development opportunities. The Cree Development Corporation is all about increasing Cree participation and Cree control.

The Cree Development Corporation will build on past successes of the Cree entities to create something bigger, stronger and better. It will retain and strengthen CreeCo. The successful companies held by CreeCo will be kept and enhanced – new opportunities will be opened up for them.

This is why the *Paix des Braves* called for the creation of the Cree Development Corporation – to serve as the primary vehicle for Cree regional economic development. And, to ensure the protection of Cree rights, the Cree Development Corporation is part of our Treaty – it falls under Section 28 of the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*.

We live in new and challenging times. New times call for new solutions. The Plan Nord and resource development projects are moving ahead in Eeyou Istchee. They will not wait for the Crees. Either we seize the initiative to shape development in Eeyou Istchee, or we will be left behind. It is time to break camp, and to move on to new opportunities.

The Cree Development Corporation will help us build a brighter future for the Cree Nation.

A message from Cree Development Corporation – Implementation Manager, Rodney W. Hester:

<http://new.livestream.com/accounts/8792434/CreeDevelopmentCorporation>



"The *Paix des Braves* of 2002 envisaged the Cree Development Corporation as a main vehicle of Cree economic development. The reasons to proceed with the Cree Development Corporation remains as compelling today as they were then. In fact, they are all the more urgent today, in order to seize the business opportunities that are arising now in Eeyou Istchee in the context of the Plan Nord and otherwise. These opportunities may not always be there in the future. Now is the time to strike, with a well-capitalized, Cree-controlled CDC, whose mission it is to develop, pursue and manage these business opportunities, to create jobs and prosperity for the entire Cree Nation."

Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come

Cree Development Corporation

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Please submit to:

Rodney W. Hester, *Implementation Manager*
Cree Development Corporation
rwhester@cra.qc.ca

** Feel free to contact the above via email for contest rules and inquiries.



Ready to compete

Cree youth depart for Regina's North American Indigenous Games

By Amy German

Almost 50 Cree athletes, coaches and staff travelled to Regina July 19 to for the 2014 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG).

The Cree last participated in the games in 2008, when they took place in Cowichan, BC. This is the first Indigenous Games since that event, which suffers from insufficient funding.

According to John Gossett, the Director of Recreation for the Cree Nation of Mistissini, the Eeyou Istchee participants placed during Mistissini's track-and-field and basketball tryouts last summer. These tryouts were not just for the Crees as Indigenous athletes from other nations – mainly from northern Quebec and areas like Sept-Îles – also participated.

The Quebec contingent will again be competing under the moniker of Eastern Door and the North as the team will feature participants from all over the province.

This year's team will be represented in a wide variety of categories that include various track-and-field events in all age groups as well as the under-19 men's basketball and the under-19 women's basketball.

"Most of the communities are represented in the Cree contingent, except for Whapmagoostui and Oujé," said Gossett. "There are 12 track athletes, two canoers, a volleyball player and eight swimmers along with the basketball players heading to NAIG."

The games started July 21 and will feature a week of competition and traditional entertainment events that will celebrate Indigenous culture and athleticism throughout North America.

"The training component has been difficult because these kids made these teams last August and they are only going now – a year later," said Gossett.

Gossett said there has been a particular focus on these games at the recreation department in Mistissini to prepare young athletes for the event. That is why the majority of youth going are from Mistissini, thought other communities were welcomed to participate in the Mistissini teams so that no talented athletes would be excluded.



2014 NAIG mascots Buffalo and Young Buffalo alongside Stan Bobb, Chair of Community Development Corporation and the medals NAIG winners will receive in Regina.

"We have made the games in Mistissini whether it is the Inter Band Games, the Cree Nation Summer Games or the NAIG. Every year we devote energies to developing our kids to participate in those regional, national and international events," said Gossett.

According to Gossett, his department has worked very hard to drum up interest in the track and field and other events that these games feature. While there is a tremendous interest in hockey, it is a very expensive sport that demands a great deal of time. Sports like track and field, soccer or basketball don't require as much financing, however, making them more accessible to all families.

Funding came from the Grand Council of the Crees and its Leisure, Sports and Recreation department as well as the Eeyou Istchee Sports and Recreation Association. The Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador is providing transportation for the participants and covering their insurance.

Excitement among those participating and those who will be cheering them on at home is mounting. The only question that remains, is who will come out on top?



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Paddling for conservation

Canoe brigade to head down the Broadback River

By Amy German

As the 40th Annual General Assembly of the Crees winds down in Waswanipi, about 16 youth and four guides will prepare for a canoe adventure down the Broadback River from Waswanipi to Waskaganish.

The expedition is a project organized by the Grand Council's Department of the Environment and Remedial Works and the Cree Nation Government Youth Department.

According to Isaac Voyageur, Director of the Department of the Environment and Remedial Works, the expedition is part of a much larger project for environmental protection.

Voyageur said that project started in the summer of 2012 when the Council Board passed a resolution to create a conservation strategy. Then-Deputy Grand Chief Ashley Iserhoff spearheaded the project but its duties have since been passed on to current Deputy Grand Chief Rodney Mark, who heads up the committee with Voyageur.

"We created a Protected Areas Committee that consists of members from each of the Cree communities as well as the Cree Trappers Association. In the meantime, the Crees of Nemaska and Waswanipi

both submitted projects," said Voyageur.

"The purpose of the Protected Areas Committee is to assist the communities in their plight to have certain areas protected within their respective territories and also assist and provide bio-technical knowledge to the communities in regards to this."

In other words, the committee helps to move the projects along and it became evident that the Nemaska and Waswanipi projects were both within the confines of the Broadback watershed.

Voyageur said the committee decided that an alliance would be formed and that something would be submitted to Quebec and the Cree Nation Government under the moniker, the Broadback Watershed Protection Plan. The submission would include the projects of both communities and the idea was to have these community-designated spots act as core areas with the surrounding areas as buffers.

Since the committee had also been trying to raise the issue of the development threat to woodland caribou – a particular concern for Waswanipi as the community has only

three intact traplines remaining after decades of resource development.

The Cree are optimistic that the Liberal government's proposal to see 50% of Quebec's north protected under the Plan Nord will help achieve the conservation of the area. A canoe brigade is one more effort to keep the campaign in the public eye.

According to Voyageur, there is a call-out for youth from all 10 communities to participate in the voyage. Youth can submit letters of interest to the Department of the Environment and Remedial Works. The goal is to get at least 10 canoes to carry 16 youth and four guides down the Broadback River though if more youth are interested other arrangements can be made.

The brigade will have a special ceremonial launch from the AGA August 6, but will actually depart down the river on August 7. They plan on arriving in Waskaganish August 25, depending on the weather.

"Another key component in this project is the exchange of knowledge from the guides to the youth who will be on this trip," said Voyageur. "We always make a point in saying that we would like to maintain Cree culture and history and this is part of this exercise."



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- 2) Facilitate the development of mineral exploration enterprises with Cree entrepreneurship;
- 3) Help encourage the Crees and Cree enterprises benefit from Quebec's regular funding programs as well as other provincial assistance allocated to mineral exploration activities;
- 4) Act as main intermediary between offers and demands of services made to Cree enterprises in matters relating to mineral exploration.

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Striking diamonds

Stornoway breaks ground on Renard Mine project

By Jesse Staniforth



Dignitaries with shovels from left to right: Sydney Swallow - Tallyman, Steve Gamache mayor of Chapais; Chief Richard Shecapio from Mistissini; Jacques Daoust - Minister of the Economy, Innovation and Export; Premier Philippe Couillard; Manon Cyr mayor of Chibougamau; Matt Manson - President and CEO of Stornoway; Jean Boucher - Member of the National Assembly for Ungava; Patrick Godin - COO of Stornoway

As one mining camp near Mistissini closes, another one opens. The difference, of course, is that the closing camp – Strateco's Matoush uranium camp – was a lightning rod for controversy. But there's no opposition to Stornoway Diamond's Renard mine, the first diamond mine in Quebec.

When Premier Philippe Couillard flew in to participate in the mine's ground-breaking ceremony July 10, he was joined by Mistissini Chief Richard Shecapio, Chibougamau Mayor Manon Cyr and Chapais Mayor Steve Gamache.

That ceremony followed a formal production decision by the company, which meant that the board of directors had agreed to move ahead with the Renard project following receipt of a \$946 million financing package from its shareholders.

"The formal decision to proceed to construction and production at Renard... represents the most significant milestone yet in the long journey to bring Quebec's first diamonds to market," Stornoway President and CEO Matt Manson said in a press release. "The Renard Diamond

"The best way for us to maximize worker retention, so people will stay on board at the mine site, is to hire people from the region."

Project is now fully permitted, financed and ready to build."

Ghislain Poirier, Stornoway's Vice President, Public Affairs, explained that the company has 30 months to bring the project into production.

"The main thing [we need to do] is to build all the infrastructure needed for the diamond production," said Poirier.

The first year of construction will focus on a permanent camp for 300 workers, and will be followed by a temporary camp for 300 more.

"It's a remote project," Poirier said. "So we need to build enough room for 600 workers – that will be the peak number during construction."

The next goal will be to get the processing camp ready to run, as well as a power-generation system.

"We will produce our electricity using liquefied natural gas," Poirier said. "We will bring it in by the road each day. It's clearly better than diesel: it's a cleaner way to produce electricity, especially for greenhouse emissions."

The good news for Crees, said Poirier, is that room in the camp for workers means jobs for workers. The Renard camp will be hiring 250 workers in the next year and a half, followed by another 250 in the 18 months after that.

"The best way for us to maximize worker retention, so people will stay on board at the mine site, is to hire people from the region," Poirier said. "When you are from Montreal, if you come to the mine site, but then have another opportunity in South

America, it's easy for you to leave. With people based in the region, they will be more loyal and [less likely to leave to pursue other work]. It's a win-win situation."

In 2012 the company signed the Mecheshoo Agreement with the Cree Nation of Mistissini and the Grand Council of the Crees, which granted Cree consent for the project. Poirier said the company is very proud of the Mecheshoo agreement, which he said will bring jobs and contracts to Mistissini and other Crees in Eeyou Istchee.

"We say we didn't negotiate an agreement, we built an agreement with the Crees," he said. "Our goal is clearly to involve them in the long term. The mine will be in production for 20 years plus, perhaps 30 or 40. We want the Crees to benefit. The Jamesiens too. The people from Chibougamau and Chapais will benefit as well."

Already, with the project to build the site road, Poirier says that the company entirely uses regional workers and equipment, organized through the Mistissini-based Eskan Company, one of the project's two main contractors. The other was Swallow-Fournier, a joint-venture company owned by the families of tallymen on whose traplines the mine site is located as well as a contractor from Abitibi.

"The road is a 100% original product," Poirier said. "These two contractors built the road last year using many local subcontractors. That was a big achievement."

The mine is slated to be up and running by the end of 2016, and is scheduled to be in full-scale commercial production by the second quarter of 2017.

"That will be for many, many years," Poirier said. "We have at

least 20 years in front of us: 11 years based on our reserve, and nine based on our resources. We are already drilling on site to increase our resources. The deposit is open, so it's possible to think about many other years ahead of us. That's why it's so important to maximize the number of Cree workers at the beginning. If they enter into our workforce, they'll be in it for a long time."

Poirier laughed at a mention of the controversy over Strateco's Matoush uranium project, which was stopped by near-unanimous opposition from the Crees.

"It's more than just the social acceptability," he explained. "That's just the beginning. You have to gain it, but then you have to maintain it after you gain it. Social acceptability is very important to us – it's my job."



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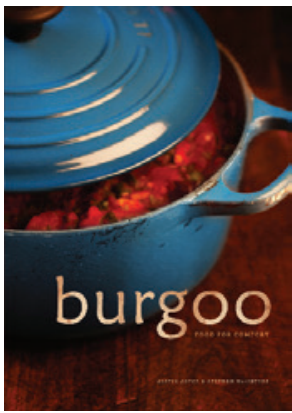
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Burgoo

A Canadian cookbook that is all about comfort

By Amy German

While the blueberries may still be ripening on the bushes and the kids are making sandcastles on the shores of Eeyou Istchee, cooler, damper weather is on its way and with it will also come the desire for heavy comfort foods.

That's when you'll need to brush up on health cooking skills, and to help, *Burgoo: Food for Comfort*, a cookbook put out by the Vancouver-based bistro chain of the same name, by Justin Joyce and Stephan MacIntyre, should be the

newest edition to your kitchen shelf.

Featuring spectacular stews, savoury sandwiches, mouth-watering starters and out-of-this-world desserts, *Burgoo* is a comfort-food treasure chest.

These recipes are very accessible, often using simple ingredients and then combining them sensibly and masterfully to achieve something divine.

What's also great about this cookbook is that it's quite varied and presents options for simple

comforts throughout the year. For hot weather, *Burgoo* has some excellent recipes for guacamole, hummus and a white-bean dip and ratatouille.

Also featuring a wide variety of spice mixes and biscuits, this cookbook has some wonderful dishes for the whole family (two fabulous recipes for macaroni and cheese) or the following recipes that are perfect for an adult dinner during a quiet night at home.

Beef Bourguignon

A red-wine braised beef with mushrooms, caramelized pearl onions and carrots

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

vegetable or extra virgin olive oil
3 lbs beef chuck, in 2-inch cubes
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 medium white onion, diced
4 to 5 medium carrots, peeled and diced
5 to 6 garlic cloves, minced
¼ cup tomato paste
1 bottle (750 ml) of your favourite red wine
3 cups good quality beef stock
2 to 3 bay leaves
3 tbsp potato starch
40 pearl onions, peeled

1 lb small button mushrooms, left whole

3 to 4 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves only, chopped

1 bunch fresh parsley, chopped

The often-mispronounced Beef Bourguignon is the most popular and longest standing dish on our classics menu. We simply love it, and we've worked hard to make it a bistro favourite. We're humbled that you share our affection for it. In our take on this classic dish, we have omitted the traditional bacon or salt pork and used potato starch instead of wheat flour to thicken the sauce. These small changes make the dish accessible to more people, but, if you like bacon, feel free to add it to yours. Bourguignon goes really well with Homestyle Mashed Potatoes (page 127) or buttered noodles. And be



sure to have at least one extra bottle of red wine and a fresh baguette on hand.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a large, heavy bottomed casserole or Dutch oven, heat vegetable (or olive) oil on high. Season beef with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, then sauté in batches until browned on all sides, about 10 minutes. Transfer cooked beef to a plate and set aside. (Cooking the beef in batches allows it to brown more evenly.)

To the pot, add diced onions and carrots and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes, until browned. Stir in garlic and sauté for another minute, then add tomato paste and cook for 1 to 2 minutes more.

Deglaze the pot with red wine (reserving ½ cup), then add beef stock and bay leaves. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, then bring the sauce to a low boil. In a small bowl, whisk the reserved wine with the potato starch to make a slurry, then whisk into the sauce. Return the beef to the pot, cover and place in the oven to begin cooking.

While beef is braising, heat a large splash of vegetable (or olive) oil in a large sauté pan on medium-high. Add pearl onions and sauté until browned on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer the cooked onions to a bowl and set aside. Add another splash of oil to the pan, stir in mushrooms and sauté for 6 to 8 minutes or until browned.

Remove the beef from the oven, add the browned onions and mushrooms as well as the thyme and ½ of the parsley. Stir well and return to the oven for about 2 hours, or until beef and vegetables are tender and sauce has thickened. Check periodically to be sure the liquid has not evaporated too much, and add a little more wine or stock if necessary.

Remove stew from the oven after 2 hours and season to taste with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, then serve family style or in individual bowls and garnish with the remaining parsley.

Straight Up Tomato

A red-wine-simmered tomato soup with garlic, drizzled with extra virgin olive oil

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

2 cans (each 19 oz) diced tomatoes with juice
4 cups water
½ bottle (375 mL) of your favourite red wine
8 large, ripe garden tomatoes, diced
2 medium red onions, diced
6 garlic cloves, chopped
¼ cup tomato paste
3 tbsp brown sugar
3 tbsp balsamic vinegar
extra virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

This recipe is our version of good old-fashioned tomato soup. Pair it with the Goopy Cheese Grillers (page 73) to make our classic After School Special, especially when you need warmth on a rainy day. Heck, serve it with any sandwich that reminds you of when you were growing up.

In a large, heavy pot on high heat, bring canned tomatoes and their juice, water, red wine, fresh tomatoes, onions, garlic, tomato paste, brown sugar, vinegar and a splash of olive oil to a boil. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 1 hour. Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly.

Using a blender or a hand blender, purée soup until very smooth. Season to taste with more sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Portion the soup into bowls and drizzle each serving with a few drops of olive oil. Serve hot.



Sticky Toffee Pudding

A moist spice cake made with hazelnuts and dried fruit and topped with molten caramel
Serves 6 to 8

Pudding

½ cup butter + extra for greasing ramekins
1 cup raisins
1 cup currants
2 cups orange juice
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
½ cup hazelnuts
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp pumpkin pie spice
1 ½ cups brown sugar
2 free-run eggs

Caramel Sauce

1 cup butter, softened
1 ½ cups whipping cream
1 cup brown sugar
¼ tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp brandy or whiskey (optional)

This British steamed pudding has been on our menu since the day we opened. Although this dessert is traditionally made with dates, our interpretation uses raisins and currants instead and adds hazelnuts and a little Winter Spice. The caramel sauce is easy to make and can be flavoured with a bit of whiskey or brandy if you want to add some booziness.

In the bistros, we bake this dessert in individual ramekins and, just before serving, spoon enough warm sauce over each pudding to completely fill the ramekin. At home, you could make one large pudding in a medium casserole dish and cut it into squares, or spoon the batter into 6 to 8 medium muffin tins, turn out the cooked puddings

onto small plates and spoon the warm sauce on top. Whichever method you choose, a simple rule of thumb is to pour the batter about 2 inches deep, and not much more, so that it bakes evenly. Make the caramel sauce while the pudding is cooking.

Serve this dessert warm with generous scoops of fresh vanilla ice cream or, the traditional British way, topped with several lashings of cream.

Pudding: Preheat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease 6 to 8 individual ramekins with butter.

In a medium pot on medium-high heat, boil raisins and currants in orange juice until most of the liquid has evaporated, 6 to 8 minutes. Set aside to cool slightly.

Place flour, hazelnuts, baking powder and Winter Spice in a food processor and pulse until hazelnuts are ground to a fine powder and blended into the flour. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and set aside.

Add ½-cup butter and brown sugar to the food processor and mix until fluffy and well combined. With the motor running, add eggs, one at a time, blending until fluffy. Pour in the flour mixture and blend well. Transfer the mixture to a bowl.

Add the fruit mixture to the food processor and purée until smooth. Using a spatula, fold the fruit mixture into the batter. Divide the batter evenly among the ramekins, filling them no more than 2 inches deep. Bake until puddings are slightly golden and the centres spring back when pressed lightly, 35 to 40 minutes.



Caramel Sauce: In a medium pot on medium heat, bring butter, whipping cream and brown sugar to a low rolling boil. Cook for 10 to 12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until bubbling and thickened to a heavy dark golden brown syrup. Remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla (and the brandy or whiskey).

Finish puddings: Serve the puddings warm with a generous spoonful of warm caramel over top.

Preventing heartbreak

How a new CE/CLE learning campaign is getting results

While there are still many Crees who might not have ever heard of Cree Leukoencephalopathy (CLE) and Cree Encephalitis (CE), for the families whose lives have been touched by it, the scars may never heal.

Both genetic disorders caused by a mutated gene, CLE and CE are serious brain (neurological) diseases that affect babies and toddlers.

According to Valerie Gosselin, a clinical nurse for the CE-CLE Education and Genetic Carrier Screening Program, both of these diseases are passed genetically through this mutated gene. The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) sees one to three cases per year.

"In cases of CLE the baby will be born healthy and look good, but will not be able to cope with fever. So with the first fever or viral infection that the baby gets, they will get really sick and die within a few weeks to a few months of that," said Gosselin.

"CE is a disease that affects babies but this is something that we can see at birth as it is caused by calcium on the brain that stops it from developing the way it should and so the child is severely handicapped. Some will die a few months after birth while others may survive a few years though they will be severely handicapped – they will be blind, never talk or walk or attend school."

According to the CBHSSJB, the CLE gene occurs in about one in every 11 Crees and the rate for CE it is about one in every 17.

The program for CE and CLE began in 2006 through the Eeyou Awaash Foundation, created by the parents who lost babies to this disease. Prior to 2006 doctors and scientists focused on finding a cause for the disease.

Once it had been determined that it was caused by a genetic mutation that could be passed down through the generations, the next step was to provide testing to determine if future parents are at risk of having a child born with either disease.

If two carriers have a baby together, the chance of passing along the gene increases and so the CBHSSJB have recommended that these individuals get the unborn child screened.

Services were set up in the communities to help screen and inform prospective parents about these diseases. Gosselin said it became evident that it could be helpful to Crees if they knew whether or not they were carrying this gene before they started a family. Because of the high rate of teen pregnancy in the Cree communities, education and testing are very important.

With this in mind, the CBHSSJB decided that the best way to get the message out was to offer learning opportunities to secondary students.

"We wanted to just give out this information because a few years ago, before the program existed and the blood test was available to screen for it, there was a lot of myths about the disease. There were rumours that breastfeeding was causing it or it was a result of the parents' bad behaviour. The families that were affected by this were being talked about because their child appeared healthy and then died," said Gosselin.

Gosselin and Jessica Le Clerc-Blain, a researcher from the Ste-Justine Children's Hospital in Montreal, began visiting secondary schools in the Cree communities this year to offer learning sessions about CLE and CE. Students were then surveyed to determine how useful they found the information.

Gosselin said she explains the diseases and what they can and cannot do. She emphasized that adult carriers of the gene mutation will not develop either disease.

"Our goal is to give out information so that the next generation of parents has heard about this disease and know how it is passed on. The second objective is to then offer them this blood test. It is really important to note however that these blood tests are never mandatory. You can take them if you would like to, but it is up to the students to decide whether they want to do this or not," said Gosselin.

Results of the program show that the youth learn about CLE and CE, the more they volunteer for testing.

According to the results from visits with Secondary 3-5 students in six of the communities (267 students), eight out of 10 students who participated in the non-mandatory survey felt that they had enough or more information about CLE and CE.

"We compared answers from surveys that were done before and after Gosselin's education session, and found that for most knowledge questions (11 out of 14 questions), knowledge improved significantly after the education session. This indicates that the education session most likely has a positive influence on students' knowledge. By knowing and understanding the information, students can make informed decisions about carrier testing," said Le Clerc-Blain.

Other facts that are determinable from these surveys show that:

- Seven out of 10 participants thought it is a good or very good idea to offer the CE-CLE blood test in high school;
- 2.5 out of 10 eligible students decided to do the blood test when they met the program nurse individually after the education session;
- Participants answered that the most common reasons for doing the CE-CLE blood test is to find out for sure if they are a carrier, and to avoid giving birth to a baby with CE or CLE;
- Participants answered that the most common reason for not doing the CE-CLE blood test is not wanting children right now.

"When we first go into the schools we find that there are students who have never heard of these dis-

eases. For the Secondary 3 students, if they don't actually know anyone who has suffered from it, then they often won't have heard of it before. Or, they may have heard about it but are somewhat unclear about it. When we go back to the Secondary 4 or 5, we are able to see that they have understood the presentation and are getting it," said Gosselin.

For teens who discover they are gene carriers, Gosselin said that nothing changes until they want to start a family.

"If they are carriers I will meet with them again to let them know their results and the next phase after that will be for them to reach me again when they do have a stable partner so that we can assess whether they had done this blood test before or not and whether the couple is at risk or not," said Gosselin.

"For those who are at risk we do offer prenatal diagnosis. The goal of the program is to be able to be there, step by step with the couples that are at risk to help them to have healthy children."

In the fall, Gosselin and Le Clerc-Blain will visit schools they have not yet visited and then revisit others to assess the impact of the information sessions on students.



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UNDER THE NORTHERN SKY

A matter of survival

by Xavier Kataquapit

My experience with religion has been interesting to say the least. In Attawapiskat, the Jesuits established a church as part of the French wave of colonists during the early days of the fur trade. The English also dispatched Anglican missionaries to First Nation territories on the Hudson and James Bay with the most notable being Moose Factory.

Many of us Cree up the coast accepted the new religions forced upon us. Over the years we were swept up in European religious beliefs. However, we also brought to it our own traditional beliefs so that we ended up with a strange if not schizophrenic blend of religion.

Thankfully, we survived a systematic assault on our beliefs and traditional ways through the signing of treaties that corralled us onto reservations right across this vast country. We also survived the strategy of assimilation through the development of the residential school system in which thousands of First Nation children were rounded up and taken from their parents to learn the ways of the European.

Today we have a more open society that allows First Nation people to return to our traditional and cultural ways. All over the country Native people are rediscovering the traditions and beliefs that our ancestors lived by. There are many traditional leaders as chiefs and council members today and our people are returning to drumming, dancing and cultural activities.

Non-Native people often ask me to explain First Nation religious beliefs. This question is complicated because there are so many different interpretations depending on your point-of-view

or perspective. After many years of interviewing and learning from traditional teachers, leaders and Elders I think I have found a comfortable way to find meaning in a belief that is spiritual rather than religious. I think that Buddhism is probably the religion or belief structure that could be compared as similar to Native traditional spiritualism. The main reason is due to the common belief in that everything is connected and every action has a consequence.

I imagine that many peoples in held this belief in universal connectivity simply because it had to do with survival. We needed to depend on all the living things and the environment around us to survive. We needed to have respect for other human beings on the land and to realize that sharing and harmony was imperative if we wanted to survive. We needed to remember that respect for the land, the water, trees and all life was a necessary belief if we wanted to survive.

This belief in connectivity or oneness is something that is integral to how Native spiritual people think and live. At a time in the evolution of this world I am often disappointed in how we are treating each other when it comes to beliefs or religions. Many Christian fundamentalists have very narrow views and much of this seems to stem from a trend to politicize religion. Often, through history, it is evident that religions have been used to further the strategies of political leaders in terms of invasion, dominance, war and control over many by few. Fundamentalists in the Islamic faith that I have met also are convinced that their beliefs are set in

stone and that blind faith overrules anything else.

Over the years I have come to the conclusion that blind religious faith is a very sad and tragic mindset. As free thinkers and individuals we all should always be able to question anything in our universe. Too often I have encountered religious fundamentalists who believe that their religion or belief system should be imposed on everyone else. That leads to continual conflict, as we have seen through the ages and now witness today. Every fundamental religious follower believes that their particular belief system will take him or her to heaven while those who are non-believers will be damned to hell.

Perhaps it is possible that as we evolve we will remember that it is in our best interest as a species to get along with one another and get back to realizing and feeling the connectivity that we have in this wonderful universe. As our early ancestors realized we need to do this as a matter of survival.

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